

DON'T BREAK OLD SOD

ESPECIALLY IF YOUR HORSES ARE LIGHT DRAFT AND HIGH SPIRITED.

What Every Veteran Will Agree Is Good Advice to the Young or Amateur Farmer. You'd Best Draw Your First Furrow in the Autumn.

Maybe you have never held the plow handles behind a steady moving team of horses or a pair of oxen of still slower and more uniform rate of progress. If you have not, you do not know by experience that plowing is an operation requiring skill and patience as well as plenty of brute strength.

If you are a farmer's boy, but have not yet gone into the field a-plowing, you will do well to draw the first furrow in the autumn rather than in the spring, for although the atmosphere of autumn is bracing and in its chillness forestalls the freezing atmosphere of winter, yet it lacks the raw edge of the springtime air that comes from snow-

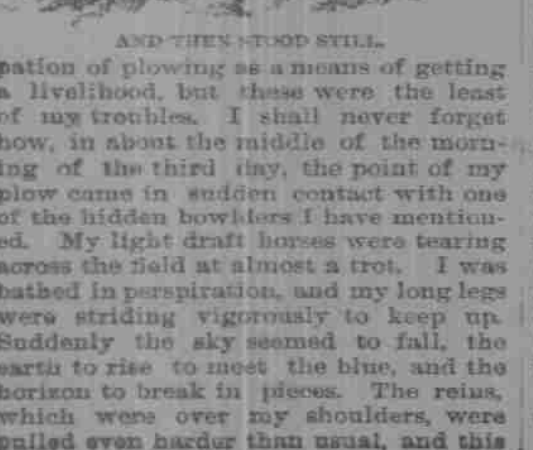


drifts yet unmelted in the fence corners and in the gullies of the hillside, and it still retains some of the balm of summer. You will do well, too, if the choice is left to you, to begin your plowing in a field that has recently been cropped and not in one whose surface is covered with a sward of some years' growth, especially if your team be light, for only the heaviest draft animals can be used in breaking sward with any comfort to the man who holds the plow handles. Light horses are obliged, in order to haul the plowshare's cutting edge through the sward's thick mass, to move with much greater speed than the heavy ones, and the man who plows sward with horses weighing less than 1,000 pounds apiece is far more wearied when at noon the dinner horn calls to the midday meal than his neighbor whose team is heavier is likely to be at night.

My first experience as a plowboy was in the autumn in a 15-acre field of sward that had not been turned for 25 years. Fair and smooth this field appeared to the eye, for although it had originally been covered with stones they had been picked clean and laid into walls in place of fences, with the exception of here and there a boulder showing its rounded brown or white surface in strong contrast with the prevailing green. These boulders, however, did not add to the difficulty of breaking up the sod, for they could be avoided, but there were others, lying just below the surface, which could not be perceived till they were struck, and therein lay my greatest difficulty. My team was light, one of the horses weighing about 1,000 pounds and the other about 1,100. Every farmer knows that such a team ought not to be put in to break sod. I knew it now, and it was in that field of sward that I learned it.

My little horses, barely more than ponies, were admirably adapted to light road work, but not at all to breaking sod. Besides being light they were high strung and doubtless indignant at the heavy task I placed upon them. By no possibility could they do the work at a steady, even gait. They were obliged to raise across the "lands," as the sections into which a field is divided by the plowman are denominated. If you have ever played, you do not need to know of my misery during the fortnight that was consumed in breaking those 15 acres of sod. It was almost impossible to keep a straight furrow, and frequently the plow would run completely out of the ground, making it necessary to back the horses with one hand and haul the heavy iron sod breaker with the other to the point of leaving the furrow. This about constant bobbing in and out of the furrow was extremely conducive to bruises. As I am rather tall, I was thumped continually in the region of the hips, which became black and blue on the first day of my labors in the field and remained so until the work was entirely finished. If I had been shorter of stature, I would have received the plow handles' hammering on the ribs.

This punishment and the exertion of keeping my team as near straight as possible were enough to make any one in position to do so forswear the occupation of plowing as a means of getting a livelihood, but these were the least of my troubles. I shall never forget how, in about the middle of the morning of the third day, the point of my plow came in sudden contact with one of the hidden boulders I have mentioned. My light draft horses were tearing across the field at almost a trot. I was bathed in perspiration, and my long legs were striding vigorously to keep up. Suddenly the sky seemed to fall, the earth to rise to meet the blue, and the horizon to break in pieces. The reins, which were over my shoulders, were pulled even harder than usual, and this



gave me the impression that my neck as well as the horizon was broken. For a moment the team struggled frantically, dragging me over the handles of the plow, and then stood still.

Then I got to my feet and began an investigation. First I loosened the team and let them rest and graze. Then I pulled the heavy iron contrivance out of the furrow and examined it. The point was broken short off and lay in the bottom of the shallow trench, against the top of the boulder I had struggled with to my defeat. As I had not anticipated any such experience, being green in the matter of breaking sward, I was obliged to leave my work and go three miles to the village for a new point. The portly old "storekeeper," who had himself been a farmer and when a boy had personally had a first experience between the plow handles, I told the story of my mishap. It seemed to him vastly amusing, and he suggested that I should take half a dozen points along so that in case I ran across more boulders I would not have to lose time making extra trips. I accepted his advice and drove back to the field determined to watch out for hidden obstacles the rest of the day. All went well until about 3 o'clock. Perhaps I had grown careless by that time, though, now that I think of it, I fail to see how, with so light a team, I could have avoided breaking points. At all events, I struck another boulder, and the result was even more disastrous than when I collided with the first one.

My poor little horses were forging ahead quite as rapidly as before, their nostrils swelling and their necks and flanks flecked with foam, when we struck. I knew what was the matter this time, but I was quite unprepared for what happened. It was not the point that gave way, but the iron beam, a much more serious matter, for while points cost but a few cents apiece the price of a beam runs up into the dollars. I don't remember the exact amount, but it was enough to seem a great sum to me then. Besides it meant a much greater loss of time than if I had simply broken a point, for to get a beam casted I had to go to the county seat, some 15 miles away, where the plow was manufactured. Fortunately I found on closely examining the break that there had been a flaw in the casting, and for that reason I was able to force the manufacturer to furnish a new beam gratis.

I have no distinct recollection of the number of boulders with which I afterward came in collision. It was probably less than 100, and I know it was more than six, for I remember distinctly having to make several trips to the good natured old storekeeper for more points. He said I was the best customer he had



"YOU WON'T BREAK SO MANY POINTS" that autumn, and so far as profits to himself were concerned, he wished I would plow sod abundantly in hidden boulders—hard heads he called them—for the rest of my natural life. The last time I went to him for a new supply he made a suggestion which I adopted to my profit, though it was profitable to him too. It was that I should hire his horse at 50 cents a day and keep it until I should finish the plowing with the three horse team I would then have at my command.

"You see, my young friend," he said, "that three horse of mine is heavier than either of yours, and he'll kinder hold them back. Then if they go staidier and slower you won't break so many p'int's, and you won't run half so much risk of straining them points of yours. You might easy spavin one of them or otherwise hurt him so that he would never be so good again."

When the job was done and I found that I really had injured both my horses, I wished that he had spoken sooner, but my wish in that direction was not half so strong as the wish that I had never thought of breaking sod for winter wheat. That was the crop I designed putting in, and in order to further fit the ground after plowing for the wheat I had to drag it. Some times dragging is called harrowing, but by whatever name you know it it is not a pleasant occupation. To be sure, the drag has no handles to thump you in the side, nor has it points to break on boulders, but it is a good deal harder to tramp over freshly turned soil, soft and spongy and yielding to the weight, than it is to walk along the hard bottom of a furrow. If the weather is dry, too, he who drags is tortured with a plague of dust, if it is wet, he carries on his feet constantly increasing accumulation of earth. Some days at 6, when I knocked off work, I used to think my feet weighed a ton apiece.

After the dragging came the drilling, which I hired done, and the following summer the harvest. I hired a man with an old fashioned reaper to cut my wheat and helped him to do it myself. But that's another story. My farmer readers will not be surprised when I say that, the year being poor for wheat, the net profits of my adventures in breaking sod for winter wheat, counting my own wages nothing, were only \$7.15. Besides I spavined one of my beautiful road ponies, as I have already said, and the other got the heaves through being watered too soon after his work was finished and before he had time to get cool.

I have never held a plow handle since, and I probably never shall again.

M. I. DEXTER.

CELESTIAL MANNERS.

THERE ARE NO LADIES AND GENTLEMEN IN CHINA.

How In Little Tricks of Deception the Mongolian Discounts the Four Hundred. Keep Your Hat on at Table, but Pull Off Your Coat—Etiquette at Church.

[Special Correspondence.] AMOY, China, Oct. 20.—The best graduate from Dr. Blimber's famous educational establishment, or the young gentleman who has committed Chesterfield's letters to memory and imitated Ward McAllister a dozen years, would find his learning of no avail the moment he tried to cross the threshold of Chinese society.

In the language of the small boy, we are not in it. Our etiquette and formalities multiplied by ten would even then sink into insignificance alongside of that which is second nature to every almond eyed lady and gentleman of the Flowery Empire.

Right here I have already been guilty of a gross breach of Celestial good manners in using the phrase lady and gentleman. Such a phrase is unknown to John Chinaman. You cannot even say it in any one of his 118 languages. What we call a gentleman is his excellency in the orient. He may have a wife, two or three, or a regular harem. But you never refer to them. When he calls upon you, you must never say, How is your wife? or, How are the ladies of your household? The only ones who can do that are his doctor, his relatives and his most intimate friends. For an acquaintance, a mere stranger, to ask such a question is almost an unpardonable sin.

Making a Call. The simple ceremony of calling becomes a complicated system in the far east. Several days before you give notice of your proposed visit and set the day subject to the approval of your host. He answers the same on the next day, thinking you and stating that he will be only too happy to see you. When you make your visit, your runner goes ahead of your chair and sends in your card before you arrive. All this having been done, you would suppose that the doors would be open and everything ready to receive you. This is what doesn't happen.

You reach the house and find the great gates closed, barred and bolted and cannot hear a sound of life within. Your servant pounds upon the gate and yells your name out at the top of his lungs. Thereupon Bodiam seems to break loose. The servants within bawl your name and title from courtyard to courtyard until it dies away inside of the house. Watchdogs and curs snarl and bay, and after a short wait the gates are thrown open.

They bow as you go past, look surprised at your appearance, although every mother's son has been expecting you all day long and has had nothing else to do but think of your call. Your host meets you in the first covered court. He clutches his two hands convulsively and shakes them until you fear they will get loose at the wrists. You do the same thing. He then backs a step and raises his hands to cover his face, snarls and bows until he is nearly double. You take one step sideways and do likewise. Again he bows and expresses great delight and surprise. You apologize for the intrusion, but insist that you were going past by accident and could not resist the justifiable temptation of coming in and paying your humble respects to his excellency. As this goes on he is slowly backing into his drawing room, and you are pursuing him with equal skill and slowness.

A Bit of Subterfuge. Two high bred Chinese gentlemen will fool around a half an hour at a time in this manner—in fact, the longer they can keep the game going in a friendly, graceful and rhetorical manner the more it shows their education and high manners.

When you get into the drawing room, there is another long spar as to who will sit down last. Each insists upon the other taking his seat. You finally compromise by dropping simultaneously into your chairs, springing up and apologizing to each other and then sitting down again.

When you have got thus far, the Rubicon is past, and the most difficult task is over. You now enter a course of mild falsehoods and pleasing deceptions. You apologize for being late. You are always late, no matter if you are a half an hour ahead of time. Your host is certain that you are mistaken and that among all his friends you are a model of punctuality. You then tell him that you know the value of his more than valuable time and that you desire to spend just one second in the pleasure of his company. This means that you are going to stay anywhere from one hour to a week.

He replies that he hopes you will be able to spare enough of your leisure to ornament his household for a month. If any one coughs or shows signs of being sick at all, the other must compliment him upon his splendid physical appearance and assure him that he was never looking better. To this the proper answer is that you were a hopeless wreck before coming into the house, but that the unexpected honor has made you into a new man. There are 100 other falsehoods of this class through which you slowly wander. Then you reach a stage of comparative common sense. In this part of the game you comment upon the beauty of the house, the excellence of his furniture, the beauty of your host's wearing apparel, the splendor of any jewelry he may have on.

A High Compliment. About this time you are thirsty, and a servant supplies you with tea, wine or other beverage. In this he helps you, and you help the host. He stands and bows to your drinking cup. You rise and bow to his. Then you bow to each other and fall back into your chairs. All this time you must keep up a very large and generous smile. He will now seize the drinking cup with

two hands, slowly drain the contents, and then, extending the arms, he depresses the cup until you can see that he has finished every drop. This pretty custom had a very unpoetic origin. Ages ago there were a large number of Chinese Borgias, and poisoning was a very common crime. The drinking together and the draining of the cup is mute evidence of amity between the parties and of the enormities that were practiced in bygone years.

When you finish your call, you go through the same performance, but only backward. You also assure your host that whenever you are in trouble and need information or advice you will call upon him again and draw upon his deep wisdom. He, of course, returns the compliment with 50 per cent interest.

At the table, if you run across a bone in your food, do not give yourself the slightest uneasiness. Throw it on the floor. If anything burns you or tastes unpleasant, never eject it from the mouth on the right hand side. Turn your head to the left and spit to your heart's content. If there are too many drops in your tea, or if your piece of fish has fallen into your wine cup, pour them out on the floor.

Do not expect a napkin. When your lips or your hands require cleaning, raise your eyebrows at a servant without saying a word. He will promptly bring a glass basin full of boiling water and two soft and fleecy towels. Putting these upon a small table, he dips towel No. 1 into the water, wrings it out and hands it to you smoking hot. You immediately take it and cover your face and neck with it. Let it stay there a half a minute, rub your hands and wrists on its corner, and then hand it back. The sensation is much pleasanter than might be supposed. It cleans far better than the napkin, and the reaction from the heat makes the face and body quite cool and checks perspiration better than any fan or hood drink.

Always Sit In Your Shirt Sleeves. If you see any nice morsel in a dish, seize it with your chopsticks and hand it to your host or next door neighbor. If he doesn't like it, put it in your mouth. This is regarded as being very friendly. In warm weather rise up after five minutes' calling, give your coat to a servant and sit in your shirt sleeves. Your host and the other guests will immediately do the same.

When you are in the drawing room with a Chinese gentleman and three or four people enter, fall down on all fours and rub their foreheads in the dirt and dust, do not be surprised. They are poor relatives, children or servants, and are merely kowtowing.

Keep your hat on indoors. It would be far better to take off coat and trousers than to interfere with your headwear and footwear.

Be careful about white, which is the color of mourning. When worn at all, it is combined with a bright colored border or collar and makes a very even then is only used by girls and children.

Black is another suspicious color. It is the uniform of a large number of devils and a large proportion of the population of hell and purgatory. It is seen less in the far east than any other shade.

Do not be astonished at old men flying kites, spinning tops or indulging in other childish games. It is not only a custom of the land, but it is recommended by the sages and doctors of the country as an aid to health and a preservative of youth.

If you lose your temper, never take hold of a Chinaman's cue. It is not that it pains him, because it does not. But it is the bitterest insult which can be offered him. Besides that, it may come off. The cue is braided in with heavy, strong black silk and frequently weighs 1½ or two pounds. The constant strain of the weight upon the roots weakens the hair cells and produces more or less baldness and at the same time destroys the tenacity which short hair displays.

A Word of Warning. When a Chinese lady goes past in a chair, do not stare at her, no matter how much encouragement she may give you, and never indulge in that noble American pastime which is known by the vulgar term of "mashing." You will not be arrested, because the Chinese policeman has a great horror of official work. But you are liable to have about as lively a time as you ever experienced in your life. It is a grave offense for a Chinaman and to their minds a much graver one by European or American. You may be beaten, deluged with mud and nameless filth, or you may be half killed with stones, bricks and tiles.

The Mongolian is very handy with a missile, and when he does use one he uses it for all it is worth.

Never carry a bundle when you can help it. It is considered undignified and an attempt to rob the poor. There are thousands of coolies in every city who are only too glad to earn 1 or 2 cents in carrying packages. They stand around stores and public thoroughfares waiting, like Wilkins Micawber, for something to turn up.

Do not walk when you can see a chair. The street of a Chinese city is so filthy that, no matter how carefully you pick your footsteps or how old your clothes, they are very apt to be ruined by a five minutes' jaunt. Besides that, the lowest classes have a religious fondness for vermin of all sorts, so that to jostle against one is liable to keep you or your servant busy for a long time.

When you go to Chinese churches or temples, give a small present to the priests. They have no salary or wages, and on account of the absolute indifference of the wealthy Chinese to all religious matters are about the most poverty stricken clergymen the world knows.

In a Chinese church laugh and talk all you please. No matter how idiotic and grotesque their faith, it is one of good nature, light heartedness and joy, for long centuries have killed off or worn away such sterner elements of worship as contrition, confession, expiation and repentance. The gambler goes to pray for luck and the thief for a successful haul.

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